AFRICAN BIBLE PICTURES;

LUTHERAN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY.

OR,

Scripture Scenes and Customs in Africa.

BY

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MISSIONARY TO WESTERN AFRICA.

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INTRODUCTION.

Not a few of the scenes and occurrences witnessed by the traveller in Western Africa, remind him of some portion of Scripture, or some incident therein recorded. This is doubtless partly owing to the fact that the climate and productions of that country are much the same as those of the Eastern lands, to which the descriptive and historic portions of Scripture mostly relate—partly to the fact that heathen people in all countries and of all races are, in their social condition, much alike; and therefore the modern heathen of Africa would necessarily institute usages similar to those of the ancient heathen mentioned in the Bible—but mostly owing, perhaps, to the fact that the negroes are descendants of the ancient Cushites or Ethiopians that once dwelt in the countries of the East, where most of the scenes of the Scriptures are laid, and therefore would naturally retain

among them some at least of the same usages that were prevalent in the East many centuries ago.

But however this may be, it is certain that during the time which I spent in that country, I was often forcibly reminded of many Scripture scenes and usages, by what I saw in African life around me; and as some incidents there witnessed seemed to throw light on certain portions of Scripture, I then first thought of preparing this little volume, which I hope may afford youthful readers some information about Africa, and also serve to increase their interest in the study of the Bible.

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AFRICAN BIBLE PICTURES;

OR,

SCRIPTURE SCENES AND CUSTOMS IN AFRICA.

RETIRING AT NOON.

THE country of Western Africa is the same as was formerly known by the name of Guinea. The northern part of it was called Upper Guinea, and the southern part Lower Guinea. Different portions of it were also named after the things chiefly produced in them, and exported to other lands — as the Grain Coast, the Gold Coast, the Slave Coast, and the Ivory Coast. But all these districts are embraced in what is now known as Western Africa.

This country lies on the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean from South America; and being thus far south, the climate is warm at all seasons, and during portions of the year it is oppressively hot. Although the morn-

ings and evenings are comfortably cool, yet, in the middle of the day, when the sun pours his burning rays perpendicularly on the earth, the heat becomes almost intolerable to those who have been accustomed to cooler climates. Even the natives complain much of the mid-day heat, and generally cease from labor for two or three hours, and retire to their houses, or to the cool shade of some favorite grove. In these agreeable retreats they often have hammocks, or hanging-beds, suspended between two trees, and on these, or on couches of some other kind, they recline to take their accustomed rest, or "nap at noon."

Some portions of the land of Palestine, where most of the events recorded in the Bible took place, are also very warm during part of the year; and in consequence of this, the same custom of resting at noon seems to have prevailed among the former inhabitants of that noted land. In 1 Sam. ii. 11, we read that Saul and his army "slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day:" but it seems that they then desisted, although they were accustomed to follow up their defeated and scattered enemies. They no doubt therefore ceased because of the great heat that came

on at the hour of noon. We learn also from 2 Sam. iv. 5, that when "the sons of Rimmon came about the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth," for the purpose of taking his life, they found him lying "on a bed at noon"—that is, taking his usual mid-day rest. They no doubt expected that he would be thus retired, and perhaps asleep, at that hour, and therefore went then, that they might more easily succeed in their wicked designs.

How often in various parts of Western Africa, on seeing the people repose at noon, under a cluster of magnificent palm-trees, or the fruitful orange, or the broad-leafed and beautiful plantain, have I thought of the description which is given of the blessedness of Christ's reign, in the fourth chapter and fourth verse of Micah, where the prophet says "they shall set every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none shall make them afraid." Or when seeing the people, almost overcome with the excessive heat of the noon-day sun, eagerly seek the cool and pleasant shade, how forcibly have I been reminded of the declaration of Isaiah, that, in Christ's reign, a man shall be to his fellow "as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" is to the fainting traveller.

DWELLING IN WALLED TOWNS.

(See Frontispiece.)

VAST portions of Western Africa lie in an uncultivated state, and are not occupied by any settled inhabitants. Some of these regions are rugged hills and mountains, covered with massive rocks — some are marshy districts, overgrown with swamp timber and water-grass, and some again are wide plains and valleys of fertile land, but covered so densely with trees and shrubbery as to be almost impenetrable to the traveller.

In these great waste places, multitudes of ferocious animals lurk during the day-time; and going forth at night, prowl about the country in search of prey, thus making the night a time of danger to domestic animals and to men. But in addition to these destructive beasts, there are frequent gangs of robbers, who roam over the country by night for purposes of pillage and murder. Nor are these all. The settled tribes often fall upon each other in times of scarcity, and under the dark cover of the night, destroy each other's homes and property and life.

Because of these manifold dangers, the

people do not dwell in separate families throughout the country, as a large portion of the inhabitants of most other lands do, but they live together in towns and villages, for mutual aid and protection. Even those employed in tilling the soil, do not reside upon their farms, but only go out to them each morning, to engage in the labors of the day, and in the evening return to lodge in their village homes.

When the people of a town become able to perform the labor, they generally enclose it with some kind of wall or barricade, to render themselves more secure from the dangers just mentioned. Some of these fortifications are stockades or picket-fences, made by planting sticks of timber on end in the ground, and so close together, that neither man nor any dangerous animal can pass through.

The town of Bama, near Mendi Mission, had, when I was there, three of these stockades about ten feet apart, running parallel entirely round the town. The outer fence was made just so close as not to admit a man through the openings between the logs, and was more than twenty feet high. The second one was much more compact, but not

so high, and being composed of a kind of tree whose trunk and branches continue to grow when cut into pieces and planted upright in the ground, it was a live fence, becoming more close and firm every year, and affording an ornament as well as a protection to the town. The third, or innermost fence, was made of split logs or slabs planted against each other two plies thick, so as to cover all the openings, and render it proof against bullets.

Other towns, however, are surrounded with walls made of mud or clay. These walls are constructed by putting on one layer at a time of soft clay balls, which readily yield to the shape of the harder layer beneath them, and adhering firmly to it, soon become sufficiently hard by drying to support another tier placed in like manner upon them. Thus layer after layer, as each one becomes partially dry, the wall is built up to the height of ten or fifteen feet.

This sort of wall I saw at the town of Lavanna, on the Big Boom River. The wall at the base was very thick, but was gradually drawn in or narrowed as it rose, till at the top it was only the thickness of a single boulder. The sides, however, were too nearly

perpendicular, and too smooth to be scaled without the aid of a ladder. A few feet from this wall, on the inside, there was a picket-fence, running parallel with it round the town, and the space between was driven full of small sticks of hard wood, which, being made sharp at the top, prevented an enemy from passing down the inside of the mud-wall, if he should in any way reach its summit.

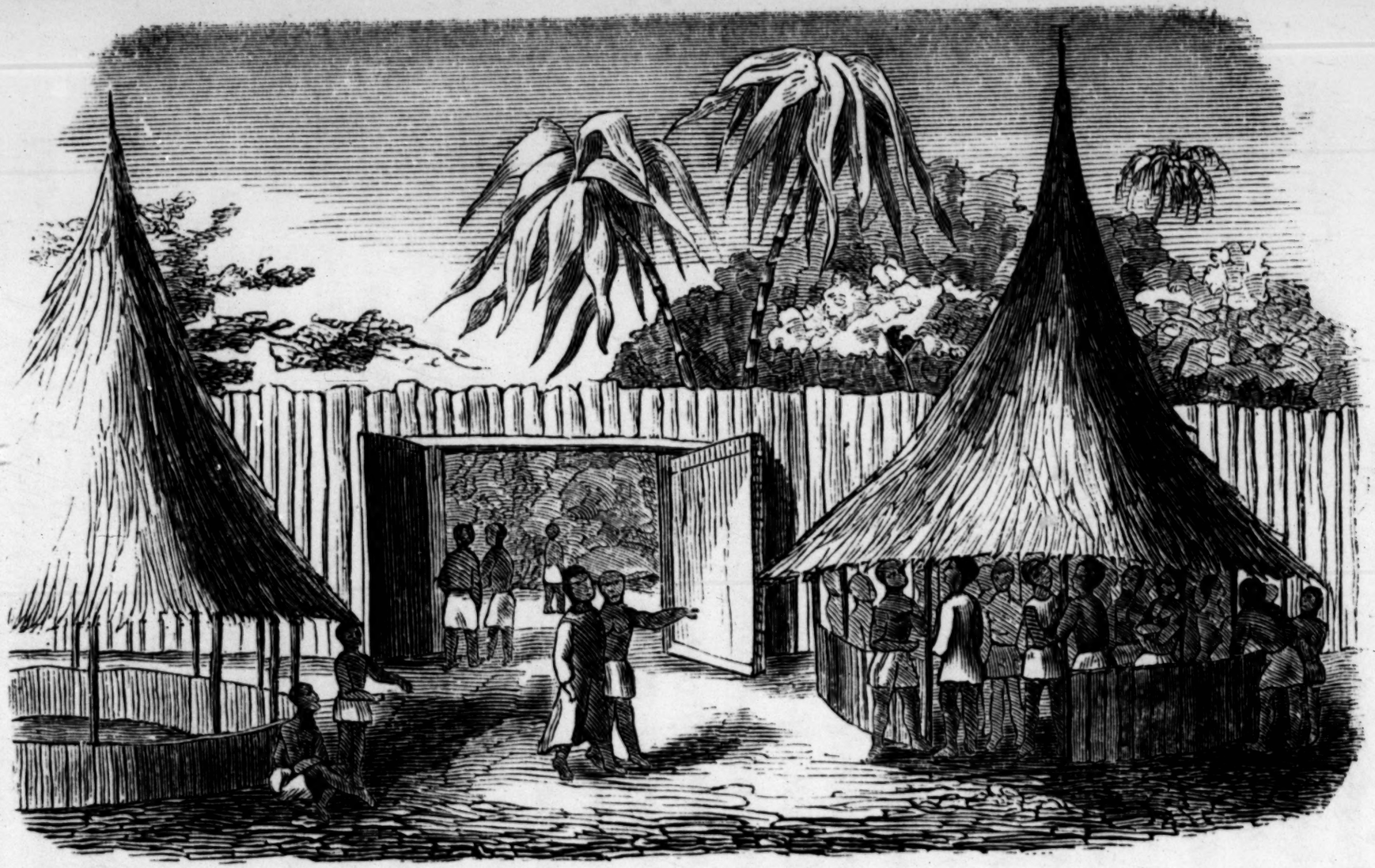
In towns with these kinds of defence, the Africans are completely protected against ferocious animals, and are also tolerably safe from bands of plunderers and the rabbles of war-men, neither of which often carry with them cannon or other engines of war by which such structures could be readily demolished.

From the frequent mention of towns and villages in various parts of the Bible, it seems that from a very early period the inhabitants of the East drew together into communities of this kind; and it most likely originated in the dangers to which the people were exposed from the prevalence of wild beasts, and the uncivilized state of society in those ancient times.

It appears, too, that the eastern people were early accustomed to enclose their towns with

walls. The towns of the Canaanites were thus fortified when the Israelites went up from Egypt to take possession of that promised land. For in the Book of Numbers xiii. 28, we learn that when the spies who had been sent to examine the land, returned to the wilderness of Paran, where the Israelites were encamped, they said "the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled and very great." In Deut. iii. 5, Moses, speaking of the "three score" or sixty cities that the children of Israel had conquered on the *east* side of the river Jordan, says, "All these cities were fenced with high walls, gates and bars." Now these cities could not have been *great* compared with such places as Jerusalem afterwards became, nor compared with such cities as New York or London; for the country in which they were situated was too small to sustain so many as sixty populous cities. They were perhaps more like the present walled towns of Western Africa, although their walls may have been built in a somewhat different way.

The great difference between the constant dangers and alarms amidst which the inhabitants of heathen countries live, and the peace



TRANSACTING BUSINESS AT THE GATE.

and safety which we enjoy in this Christian land, clearly shows the great power and goodness of the Gospel, and it may encourage us to hope that the time foretold by the Prophets may yet come, when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord" —when "nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"—when "the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." And although there is no real safety in walled towns or in cities built and fortified by men, yet there *is* a city whose inhabitants are entirely secure. It is the "City of God"—the New Jerusalem—the home of the righteous, where those enter whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, "where thieves do not break through nor steal, and where there is neither pain nor sorrow. *There* the wicked *cease* from troubling and the *weary* are at *rest*."

TRANSACTING BUSINESS IN THE GATES.

In the walls which surround the African towns, there are always several gateways through which the inhabitants pass in and

out. During the day these passages are generally kept open, but at night they are closed with large wooden doors turning on rude hinges at the sides, or else with several logs of timber suspended from the top of the gateway in such a manner as to be easily let down over the passage.

As the people all lodge in the town at night, and go forth during the day to their labors in the surrounding country, there is a great concourse at the gates during certain hours of the day. Early in the morning numerous companies of workmen are passing out to their fields and other places of employment; and in the evening, about sunset, returning from various parts of the country, they again throng the gates as they pass through to their homes.

Because of these frequent and regular gatherings of people at the gates, they become places of relating and hearing news — of discussing matters of public interest — of settling disputes and misunderstandings, and of attending to business in general. The gates therefore become places of general resort, not only for the idle and dissolute, but also for the orderly and industrious. If a man desires to speak to a certain individual, he has only

to go to the gate in due season, and wait till he comes along. Or if a number of persons desire to attend to any business together, the gate will be the most convenient place of meeting. And since this is the case, there are generally sheds or open houses erected near the entrances, for public use. In these the head men or principal men of the town are almost constantly occupied in attesting contracts and settling disputes, and trying cases of litigation.

Often, while witnessing these busy scenes at the gateways of African towns, have I thought of similar transactions recorded in the Bible. Thus in Gen. xxxiv. 20 and 21, we learn that when Hamor the Hivite and his son Schechem were anxious to have Jacob and his family settle in their country, and dwell with them, but desired first to consult the people of their own town about making that kind of proposal to Jacob, they "came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men, saying, these men are peaceable with us, therefore let them dwell in the land and trade therein." Here the gate seems to have been a place of discussing and deciding a question of public interest. It is also seen

in the 23d chapter of Genesis, that when Sarah, the wife of Abraham, died at Hebron, and he wished to purchase a burying-place from Ephron, who lived with the children of Heth, the contract was made: "In the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gates of his city." And again, the whole transaction was confirmed, "In the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gates of his city." In the Book of Ruth iv. 1 and 2, it is said that Boaz, desiring to secure from the near kinsman of Ruth the legal right to marry her, "went up to the gate and sat him down there: and behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by: unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and he said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down." Before these men thus called together Boaz laid his request; and in the 11th verse it is said that when the agreement was made, "all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses." Thus it appears that the whole transaction took place at the gate, and that the matter was first arranged before the town officers, and after-

wards ratified by them and all the assemblage of people. Perhaps there was at the gate some kind of court-room or public place, in which contracts were legally confirmed and claims to property adjusted, much the same as those seen in the towns of Western Africa at the present day.

PETTY KINGS AND KINGDOMS.

In most parts of Western Africa the traveller meets with numerous chiefs or rulers, who claim the title of king, and who are generally honored with that distinction by the people of the country. Though mostly poor, and clothed with but limited authority, they make great efforts to display their royalty, always having about them an array of servants, and, when travelling through the country, employing an armed force as a sort of body-guard. When in the presence of their own people at home, they usually hold in their hand a whip, a staff, an elephant's tail, or something of the kind, as an emblem of authority.

In the southern part of Western Africa, each of these native kings rules over a terri-

tory of considerable extent; but those living in the vicinity of Liberia and Sierra Leone, have for the most part but limited dominions, often not larger, each, than a single county in the State of Ohio or Pennsylvania. And even over this small district the king exercises but a partial control; for the chiefs and head men of the several towns within his domain have also more or less to say in the affairs of state. No alliances can be formed with other tribes — no war declared — no treaty entered into — no land disposed of — nor any new law enacted, without their consent. Still the kings are recognized as the chief rulers, and have in some particulars considerable power.

These petty kingdoms or tribes, being so numerous, and situated along the same rivers, are almost continually at variance, and often at war. It frequently happens also, that when two tribes engage in war, others near them are involved in the contest, and join in the work of murder and destruction, till the whole country becomes a scene of confusion and alarm, if not of ruin and desolation.

I became acquainted with a number of these so-called kings in the Sherbro, Mendi, and Timany countries, and was compelled to

learn something of their warfare. At one time, during my abode among them, those living on the north side of the river Boom, joined together against those on the south side, and for many weeks the Mission, which was not far from the river, was kept in constant alarm. War parties were continually scouring the country, blowing war-horns, firing guns, and shouting to each other in triumph or distress. When a battle was fought during the night, the whole of the following day was occupied in pursuing the vanquished party, either to capture them as slaves, or to subject them to death by cruel torture.

The political conditions of that unhappy country under the rule of these petty kings is doubtless very much like that of Canaan at the time when the people of Israel entered it under the command of Joshua. There were then in Canaan a large number of tribes, each headed by a ruler called a king; for in the twelfth chapter of Joshua there are given the names of thirty-one kings and their cities that the children of Israel conquered on the west side of the river Jordan. These kingdoms could not have been large, since the

whole country which embraced them all is not more than half as large as the State of Ohio. Perhaps they were equally as small as the present negro kingdoms of Western Africa.

The kings of Canaan also joined together in war against other allied kings just as the various African tribes are now accustomed to do. In the fifth verse of the tenth chapter of Joshua, it is said that "the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem (then a heathen town), the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmouth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together, and went up, they and their hosts, and encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it." These five kings were then too strong for the Gibeonites, and therefore they were in great trouble and distress at the prospect of falling into the hands of their savage enemies, by whom they would be tortured to death; and having before formed a league of friendship with Israel, they sent men to Joshua, saying, "Slack not thy hand from thy servants: come up to us quickly, and save us and help us."

I never realized the horrors of the scenes described in the Book of Joshua till thrown

among the heathen of Africa, and compelled to witness the degradation and cruelty of these pagan tribes, and the awful woes and miseries attending their incessant wars. Nor did I ever before set a proper estimate on the blessings of peace and safety which I had always enjoyed in our own civilized land.

PRESENTING RINGS AS SIGNALS OF AUTHORITY.

King Ibeboo once sent a young man to the Mission to prevent his warriors, who were then in the adjoining country, from molesting us, or carrying away the Mission property. When he arrived at the place, he told us that he had come in the king's name, and with authority to act in the king's stead; and then putting forth his right hand, he exhibited on his finger a silver ring, saying that it was the king's ring, and that all the warmen of their party were obliged to obey his orders while wearing that ring. This we found to be the case, for whenever any disorderly person was shown the ring, he at once yielded to the directions of the official who wore it.

It is a common custom among the African kings, when appointing any one to transact business in their stead, or to act as their minister, to give him some article that they have worn on their own persons, or have borne about the country with them, as a sign of his appointment, and the ring is perhaps more generally used for this purpose than anything else.

This practice appears to have existed among the kings of ancient times; for in the Book of Esther iii. 10 and 11, it is said that king Ahasuerus, on authorizing Haman to destroy all the Jews in his dominion, "took his ring from his hand and gave it unto Haman." Letters were then written to every province throughout the kingdom, commanding the governors to put to death all the Jews on a certain day, and the letters were "sealed with the king's ring." This impression of the ring upon the letters was the seal of their authority.

In like manner it is stated in Gen. xli. 42, that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, having appointed Joseph to rule over his house and over all the land of Egypt, "took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's

hand." This was the signal of his high authority, and accordingly the people obeyed him with promptness all over the land.

DENYING BURIAL TO ENEMIES.

During one of the African wars, an armed force of about four hundred men came over from the Lower Boom country, and made an attack on the town of Bama, near Kaw Mendi. The besiegers were defeated with considerable loss, and being scattered in the surrounding fields and woods, the inhabitants of the town rushed forth to hunt them down, and capture or destroy them. The whole of the next day was spent in this dreadful work, and many slain men lay on all sides of the town, and some on the Mission grounds, where they had been overtaken and smitten down.

From regard both to decency and health, we were desirous to have these dead bodies buried in the earth. But knowing the feelings of the natives in regard to the burial of enemies, we went first to the chief of the town, to secure his sanction to their interment, presenting the plea that the decay of so many dead bodies in the open air might

create disease. The chief readily admitted this fact, and even acknowledged that on this account what we requested was very reasonable, but said that he could not for any reason whatever grant us permission to bury the slain enemies of his people, as it was contrary to the well established and invariable custom of the country. We urged the necessity and propriety of changing the custom, as it was manifestly a bad one. But all was in vain—the usage was fixed, and must be observed; and besides, his people could not allow their enemies to be honored with burial; and if we should inter the bodies of those slain on our ground, it would be understood as an act of hostility to him and his people. The haggard forms therefore continued to lie upon the surface of the earth till devoured by wild animals, and fowls and insects, of which there are vast numbers in the country.

From certain passages of Scripture it appears that the ancient heathen sometimes denied burial to enemies and criminals, but the Jews granted them interment. In the account of the punishment inflicted on Pharaoh's chief baker, given in the fortieth chapter of Genesis, it is stated that after having

been put to death by hanging upon a tree, his body was exposed, till the flesh of it was eaten by the birds of the air. In Jer. xxxvi. 30, the prophet, when speaking of the sore calamities that the heathen king of Babylon would bring upon Jehoiakim, king of Judah, says: "His dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost." In the first part of the seventy-ninth Psalm, where there is a sorrowful description of the miseries which the heathen had inflicted on Jerusalem, the writer says: "The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth."

I shall never forget the oppressive sadness which I felt during the period already mentioned, when the ghastly forms of men lay uncovered upon the surface of the earth around me, and were torn asunder and devoured by prowling beasts of the forest, and shrieking birds of prey. How awful indeed must have been those similar but more dreadful scenes which have several times taken place at the great city of Jerusalem, when God, in punishment for its wickedness, gave it up to the ravages and cruelties of heathen nations.

PRONOUNCING CURSES OR IMPRECATIONS.

Among the Africans, almost everything that is said by way of reproach or censure is called cursing; and the natives generally become either greatly alarmed or offended if one of their own number, and more particularly if a stranger, calls them by disgraceful epithets, or scolds at their conduct. But besides all this, there are in use among them various set forms of cursing or pronouncing imprecations, which are thought to be an unfailing means of inflicting injuries upon those against whom they are employed. Some of these forms are thought to be more powerful than others; but if any one of them is rightly used, it is believed that sooner or later the evil invoked will surely come.

The pagan priests, who are commonly regarded as most skilful in this mysterious and terrible art, are greatly feared by the common people. And in like manner a missionary is often regarded with great dread, until well enough known to inspire the people with confidence in his friendship. The prayers of missionaries are especially alarming to

those who think themselves alluded to in these addresses to God.

A missionary with whom I was associated frequently visited a town on the Little Boom river for the purpose of holding religious meetings with the inhabitants of the place. He was at first well received by both the chief and his subjects; but in one of his discourses, having spoken against some of their heathen practices, he greatly offended the chief, who, on his return next time, threatened to drive him from the town, and also made some effort to prevent the people from attending preaching. The missionary, however, preached again, and in the closing exercises prayed that the chief might be converted to Christianity, and that God would remove all obstacles to the progress of true religion in the town and country. This was some way understood as an imprecation upon the chief, and caused great displeasure and alarm among his friends, while the chief himself was almost terror-stricken. The preacher was nevertheless permitted to return home unmolested; but in a day or two afterwards the chief was taken sick, and the head-men of the town, as well as himself, at once concluded that the illness was caused

by the supposed imprecation. They therefore sent a messenger to the mission, stating that the curse had taken effect, and that if the chief died, all the inhabitants of the town were determined to avenge the injury, and that nothing would appease them but the life of the offender. They also proposed that if the preacher would revoke the curse, so that the health of the chief would be restored, they would overlook all that had been done, and would be as friendly as before. For a few days there was much feeling manifested by the sick chief's people; but as he soon recovered, they became reconciled, thinking that the imprecation had been recalled, and that their threats had so intimidated the missionary as to prevent him from attempting again to injure themselves or their ruler; and they no doubt think so to this day.

There are instances recorded in the Bible where good men, in former times, declared or foretold that certain calamities would befall particular cities and individuals; as when the ancient prophets foretold the downfall of Nineveh, and Babylon, and Jerusalem; and also when Noah made known to Ham that the descendants of his son Canaan would be

enslaved by the descendants of Shem and Japheth. In these cases, however, the evils named were not invoked by the prophets; they were simply announced or foretold as punishments that would be sent upon those cities and families for their great wickedness.

But in the twenty-second chapter of the book of Numbers, we learn that the ancient Moabites entertained the same notions in regard to imprecations as the African heathen do now. For it is there related that when Balak, king of the Moabites, became greatly alarmed at the victorious march of the Israelites, on their way to Canaan, he sent messengers to a noted enchanter by the name of Balaam, and requested him to come and "curse Israel," and thereby enable him to overcome them. He also declared to Balaam that he knew that whoever was cursed by him was cursed indeed; and he promised to promote the enchanter to great honor, and to reward him bountifully, if only he would come and curse these people.

Balaam at last went to Balak; but, whatever may have been his powers of magic, he was not able by that means to inflict any injury on Israel; for we are told in the twenty-third and twenty-fourth chapters, that al-

though Balak continued his entreaties and his offers of reward, yet Balaam was unable to accomplish what he desired. The Israelites conquered their enemies, and pursued their journey to the land of promise. The curses of the wicked, like their prayers, are ineffectual.

MAKING LAMENTATION FOR THE DEAD.

When we were descending the Big Boom river, a young man who had fallen from the top of a palm-tree, in which he had been gathering palm-nuts, was taken up dead, and carried to a small town on the bank of the river. We landed at the same place, and, after ascending the steep bank on which the town was built, we walked through the thick cluster of palm, plantain, and banana trees, whose long pendant leaves and branches drooped mournfully over our heads. The path leading to the village was narrow and winding, and before making the last turn which brought us to the entrance, we heard the sound of many voices mingling in doleful cries and lamentation. As we passed on, we soon saw the corpse of the youth, neatly

enfolded in a new clean mat, and placed in a sort of court, ready to be conveyed to the lonely grave.

The mourning women, the sound of whose wailing had reached us in the grove, were standing, kneeling, and sitting around the dead body. Their hair was unbraided, and large blisters, caused by chafing the skin with coarse cloths, together with wounds made by other means, covered great portions of their breasts and arms, and were rendered more painful by the application of ashes and other burning substances. The cries of these women were so truly plaintive, and their appearance so melancholy and affecting, that we were almost moved to weep in sympathy. Some of the mourners were doubtless relatives of the unfortunate youth, but most of them were professional "mourning women" who were accustomed to attend on funeral occasions, and make lamentation for the dead.

The custom of thus employing mourners at funerals prevails among all the tribes of Western Africa. The lamentation is continued incessantly from the time at which the death occurs till the next morning after the corpse is deposited in the tomb; and then

it is often renewed each night for a week or more, and at stated periods afterwards for many months. The mourning is usually accompanied with other loud noises, such as beating drums, clapping hands, and firing guns.

If some of the relatives of the deceased are too far distant to attend the funeral, they sometimes "keep the cry," as it is called, in the place where they are when the intelligence of their loss reaches them. On these occasions only a few intimate friends are invited to join in the demonstrations of sorrow; but still the lamentation is not neglected.

We learn from Lev. xix. 28, that God commanded the Jews "not to make any cuttings in their flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon their bodies," as the heathen nations around them then did, and as the African heathen now do; but they were accustomed to employ mourners at the funerals of their friends. In Jer. ix. 17 and 18, the prophet, when describing the destruction which God would bring upon the Jews for their disobedience, says, "Call for the mouring women, that they may come; and send for cunning women (skilled in mourning or making dole-

ful noises) that they may come; and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears."

In ancient times, too, mourners were accustomed to make use of some kind of musical instruments in connection with their wailings; for it is stated in Matt. ix. 23, that when the Saviour went to the house of a certain ruler, whose daughter had died, "He saw the minstrels and people making a noise."

Death is always a solemn and awful event, and in all countries there are bitter sighs and tears when a beloved friend is called away, and the lifeless form is laid in the dark and silent grave. But the practice of inviting persons to make mournful noises, like many of the extravagant displays at funerals in our own country at the present time, seems to be entirely unsuitable to the solemnity of such occasions. In the sorrows and griefs of the present life, let us rather look forward to the future state of incessant joy, when there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying — when "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes"—and when "mourning shall flee away."

GIVING THE CUP OF CONSOLATION.

I ONCE attended an African funeral on Sherbro Island. It was a mournful scene. The deceased, a little boy about ten years old, lay in a small house, made of mud and sticks, and thatched with leaves of the bamboo tree. Near the corpse sat the mother in the dust of the earthen floor, tearing her hair with her hands, and uttering the most piteous cries. The accustomed mourners were there, and their wailings could be heard in the villages around. The father sat in silence in a small apartment near the main entrance to the open court, where the people were beginning to assemble.

I noticed that each one of the neighbors and acquaintances of the family brought a present of some sort, and after the usual salutations were over, passed it into the hand of the afflicted father, who handed it to an attending servant, to be laid aside for the funeral feast. The presents were either some articles of food or drink, or else something that could be exchanged for the native palm-wine of the country, or for rum and other liquors sold by European traders on other parts of the island; and they were brought,

as I learned from one of the natives, "to comfort the hearts of the father and mother, and to make supper for the company,"—that is, to provide a feast to be held that night, when sympathizing friends would invite the bereft family to partake of food to strengthen them, and of drink to revive their drooping spirits, and drive away their sorrows.

Accordingly, when the corpse had been deposited in the earth, a large company of friends and acquaintances returned to the house to attend the usual feast. Although the mourners remained, and continued their lamentations, yet the feast went on, attended with noise and revelry. All this was done professedly to console the sorrowing relatives of the deceased, and to enable them to bear their afflictions.

An allusion to a custom like this is found in Jer. xvi. 7 and 8, where the prophet, describing the manner in which funeral rites would be neglected in the dreadful ruin that was to overtake the Jewish nation, says, "Neither shall men give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother. Thou shalt not also go unto the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat

and to drink." The meaning seems to be, that in these sore calamities, the usual funeral observances would be forgotten — that death would become so common, and distress would fall so heavily upon all, that none would attempt to afford comfort to others, by presenting the accustomed refreshments, and holding the funeral feast.

This may have been a heathen practice, but it was, perhaps, somewhat prevalent among the degenerate Jews of that period; for they were much inclined to adopt pagan usages, although they were so strictly forbidden to follow the ways of the Gentiles. Jeremiah simply alludes to it here as a well known practice, without saying anything about its fitness or unfitness for such occasions. But he assures them that the time will come when this, as well as other formalities, however firmly adhered to then, will be laid aside and forgotten in the terrible calamities which their sins were bringing upon them.

CASTING BREAD UPON THE WATERS.

THE negroes of Africa are extremely fond of rice as an article of food. It is eaten by all classes of people, and in large quantities. The king and the slave — strong men and feeble women — the old and the young, all desire it as their daily food. The rice-harvest is the most joyous season of the year; and the failure of this favorite crop is cause for great alarm and sorrow in every village. Rice is conspicuous in the daily market — it is the subject of conversation among epicures, and is often extolled in songs and ballads throughout the land. It is the black man's "*bread.*"

Not long after my arrival on the coast, I employed a day-laborer whom I agreed to "furnish with bread," or to board, while employed at the work. On his arrival the first morning, I gave him what I considered a substantial breakfast of the same provisions of which I myself partook; but I was obliged afterwards to add the regular quantity of rice, as he insisted that he could not be boarded according to contract without rice, which was his "bread."

This grain is grown in Africa, both on the

rolling lands of the hill country, and on the low flat regions along the creeks and rivers. That which is produced on the upland is sown at the beginning of the rainy season, and is nourished by the continuous rains; but that which is grown on the lowlands is sown at the close of the wet season, when the waters that have spread over the country from the overflowing of the streams, have not entirely receded to the channels, but still form a shallow covering on the surface of the ground. On these water-covered fields, the sower goes forth scattering upon the surface of the water, the rice-grains, which, having settled into the mud beneath, quickly send forth their thrifty shoots. The water remaining for some time, causes sufficient moisture for the growth of the stalk, and by the time it has attained its height, the water disappears, and the returning dryness and heat of the earth soon cause the grain to ripen.

Now, since the Africans regard rice as their bread, and since they sow it on the water-covered fields, their rice sowing may be called "Casting bread upon the waters;" and it is to this custom, no doubt, that Solomon alludes in Ecclesiastes xi. 1, where he says, "Cast thy

bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." In Egypt (a part of Africa) and perhaps in some other countries which were known to the Jews in Solomon's time, rice was much used as an article of food or "bread," and was commonly sown in the manner just described; and therefore the Jews would readily understand the figure which is here employed.

Any one unacquainted with the business of growing rice, on seeing the sower cast the precious seed into the muddy water, might suppose that it was all lost; but if, after some months, he were to look again, and see the ripe stalks which have sprung from the buried seed, stand laden with fifty times as many grains as were sown, he would conclude that the bread that had been cast upon the water was seen again after many days.

But Solomon uses this figure to show the benefit of benevolent acts or deeds of charity; — to show that what men do for charitable objects is not done in vain, although they may not be able immediately to see the results. It is like the seed-rice cast into the watery ground; for a while, indeed, it is out of sight, but in due time it will yield a large

return. Solomon would there say that money given to sustain missions, and to educate orphans, and to feed the poor, is not thrown away, as some seem to think, but that it will at some future time bring its reward. Either at some later period in this life the giver will see and perhaps enjoy the good that he has done, or if not, he will be abundantly rewarded in Heaven for all the favor which he has shown to the needy and ignorant in this world.

Many years ago a little pagan boy was taken out of a slave-ship at the colony of Sierra Leone, in Western Africa, and placed in a mission-school at that town. After spending some years in this school, he was sent to England, and was thoroughly educated and prepared to preach the Gospel. All this cost the missionary society considerable money and labor; but it was like casting bread upon the waters, for he afterwards returned to Africa as a missionary, and is now laboring with much success among the people of his own tribe in the city of Abbeokuta, where he has established schools and a Christian church. Thus are the missionary society and its friends finding their bread again after many days. But, in a future day, much

greater results will be seen, when hundreds of these once heathen people, cleansed from their corruption, shall enter into the paradise above.

DEFENDING TOWNS WITH WALLS OF FIRE.

In most parts of the west coast of Africa, there are immense numbers of little black ants, not more than one-fourth of an inch long, and shaped much like the common black ant of our own country. They travel from place to place in close columns, generally not more than an inch wide, but often a quarter of a mile in length. One of these columns or lines of march, when seen at a little distance, extending across a beaten path or road, resembles a black leathern line or rein, such as is used on coach-horses.

Although so diminutive, these ants evince great spirit and determination. When on their march they can hardly be turned out of their course; and if disturbed, they make a united and furious attack upon any intruder, from the insignificant wood-mouse to the ponderous elephant, and none can withstand them. They crawl into the mouths and eyes

of the larger animals, as well as all over their bodies, and piercing the surface with their little nipper-shaped jaws, produce a burning sensation not unlike that caused by the sting of a bee. So great are their numbers, and so vindictive are their assaults, that both men and animals are compelled to yield the ground and allow them to pass on, which they are certain to do without much delay, unless they find some carcass to devour. In their march they drive wild beasts from their lairs in the thick jungle, and also people from their own houses in populous towns; and it is perhaps owing to this fact of their driving everything before them that they are called "*Drivers;*" for they are known by that name throughout the country.

The only means by which I have known the natives of the country to bring these determined little creatures to a halt, or to turn them out of their line of march when approaching a town, is to kindle a long train of fire in advance of them. If this fiery wall is extended along the side of the town at which they approach, and if it is kept up for a time, the "*drivers*" are compelled to turn back or change their route.

This practice may illustrate the force of the figure which God employs to express his protection of Jerusalem. In Zech. ii. 5, He says, "I will be unto her a wall of fire round about." This promise was made on the condition that the inhabitants of that great city would remain faithful to the true God; and it declares that so long as they would thus continue, he would place around them the most complete protection—protection like a wall of fire, through which no enemy could pass.

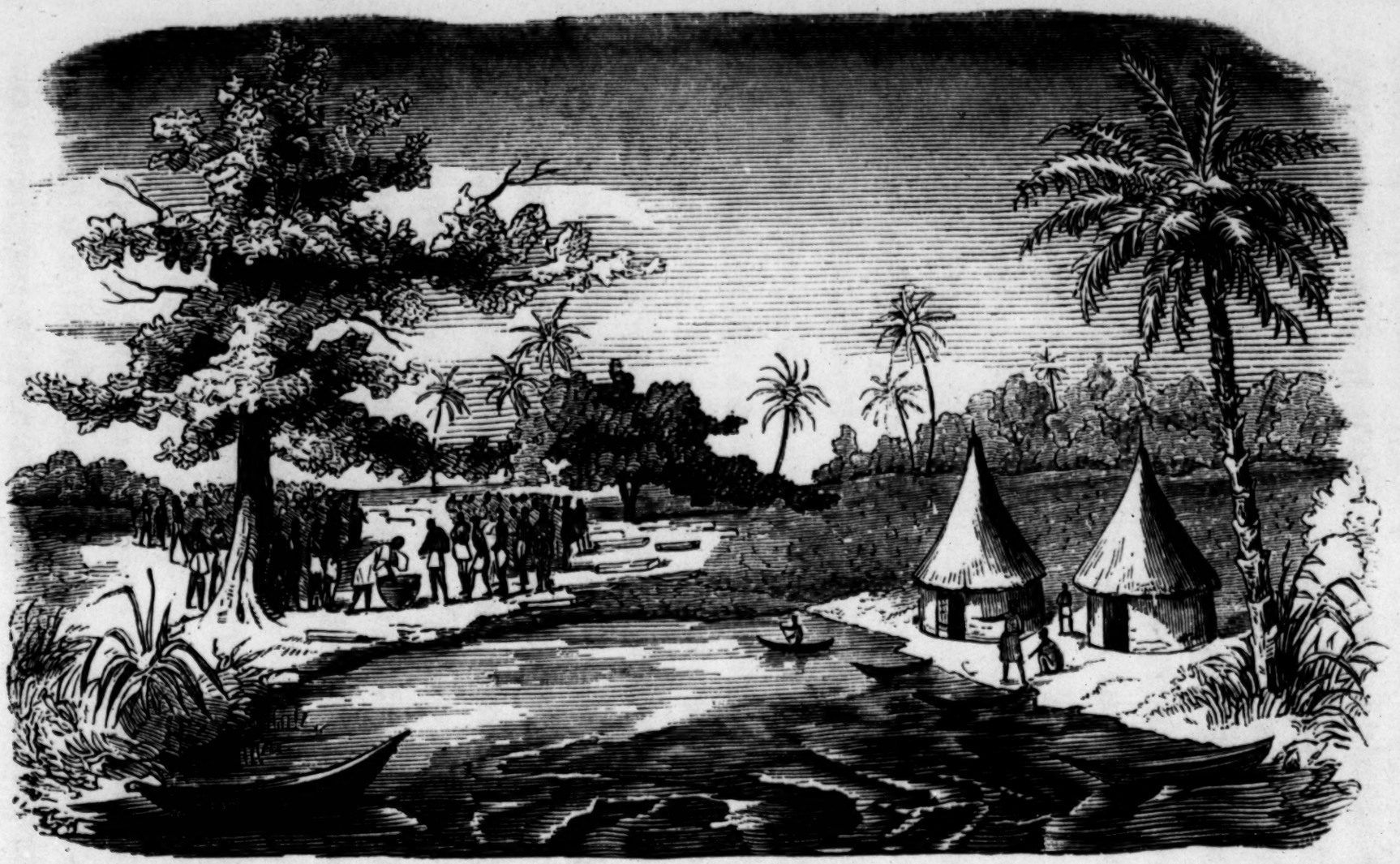
It is not likely that the figure in the text just quoted has any allusion to the particular custom of making fires to ward off such insects as the *Drivers* of Africa; but it certainly does allude to the practice common in many countries, and among various nations, both ancient and modern, of keeping up fires during the night to prevent ferocious animals from attacking persons who may be lodging out of doors. Such wild beasts are known to dread a blazing fire, and will not approach very near it to injure even a solitary woodman. A circular line of fires, therefore, kept up about an encampment during the night, is a most complete security against dangerous animals; and as in former times many

such animals dwelt in the forests and rocky hills of Canaan, the Jews were familiar with their nature and habits, and could well comprehend the meaning and force of the promise that God would be to them "a wall of fire."

How safe at all times are they who confidently trust in God, and earnestly strive to obey him—who put their trust in the Almighty. Though dangers may surround them like howling beasts of prey gather about the belated traveller, yet he will encircle them with the arm of his providence, and his unseen presence, like a fiery wall, will turn back or consume every approaching ill. "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul." "There shall no evil befall thee."

WASHING HANDS IN INNOCENCY.

Hostilities had existed between a number of Sherbro and Mendi chiefs for many months—numerous towns had been destroyed—hundreds of people had been slain in battle, or otherwise put to death—and hundreds more had been carried away by their captors and sold into slavery. The agricultural and ma-



PEACE RATIFICATION.

nufacturing pursuits common in the country were all neglected; and the people who survived were driven into the walled towns, where multitudes were on the point of perishing for want of food.

Under these extreme sufferings the people on both sides earnestly desired an end of the war; and finally a meeting was called, to which all the kings and chiefs involved in the strife were invited, to form a treaty of peace. A place called Yawney on Sherbro Island, the burying ground of the kings of Sherbro for generations past, was the point selected for this assemblage.

There were present to take part in the proceedings, eight or ten kings and chiefs from various parts of the country, and also a number of persons who appeared as representatives of those kings, who were unable to be present themselves. Besides these, a large collection of inferior chiefs, headmen and common people attended as spectators and witnesses of the proceedings. The spot on which they were assembled was a sort of sacred campus, immediately surrounded by the graves of their departed fathers, and overshadowed by the wide-spreading branches of magnificent trees. An air of solemnity per-

vaded the assemblage, and ran through all the doings of the day.

After much deliberation and discussion, the terms of the treaty were settled, and having renounced all hostility to each other, and having promised to adhere to the agreement just formed, the parties proceeded formally to confirm the whole according to the custom of the country. This was done in the following manner. The kings, chiefs, and representatives, all stood in a circle in the midst of the consecrated ground; a vessel filled with clean water was placed in the centre, and each one after dipping his hand in the water, to signify his cleansing himself from all past enmity, extended it to those of the opposite party in renewed friendship. At the conclusion of this significant ceremony, it was announced that the peace treaty was ratified, and that all again were friends. I noticed that some of the chiefs who cheerfully gave their consent to the terms of the treaty hesitated much, and even trembled as they participated in this impressive formula; thereby showing that they regarded it as more sacred and binding than their own solemn declarations and promises.

This ceremony bears some resemblance to that which Jehovah established among the Jews, and which is described in the twenty-first chapter of Deuteronomy. We there learn that if a slain or murdered man was found in the field, and the authorities could not discover who slew him, the elders of the town nearest the place were to take a heifer to an uncultivated valley, and having beheaded her, to "wash their hands over the heifer," and to say, "Our hands have not shed this blood (the blood of the slain man,) neither have our eyes seen it." This washing of hands appears therefore to have been designed as a formal declaration that the people of the town were not guilty of the murder.

To this usage, most likely, David alludes, when he says, Ps. xxvi. 6, "I will wash my hands in innocency." And to the same striking ceremony Pilate resorted to signify that he would have no part in the condemnation of the Saviour. For after he had, in words, again and again testified to the innocence of Christ, and had refused to pronounce a formal sentence against him, we are told (Matt. xxvii. 24) that "He took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just

person." He no doubt designed by thus washing his hands to disavow in the most positive manner all participation in that awful transaction.

It would have been well for Pilate if he had been as free from guilt in this matter as this part of his conduct, in itself, indicated. But, as a ruler, he should not only have refused to condemn this "just person," but should also have protected him from his persecutors. This Pilate did not do, and he was therefore guilty.

USE OF TALISMANS OR CHARMS.

ONE of the most prominent features in the heathenism of Africa is the use of charms, generally called "Greegrees" or "Fetiches." The tribes on the West Coast universally indulge in this species of superstition, although some of them may practice it less extensively, and adhere to it with less tenacity than do others.

The "Greegrees" are mostly invented by the native priests. They are composed of various materials, put up in different forms, and used for numerous purposes. Some are images made of wood, clay, or stone, and set up at

the entrances of towns and private dwellings to secure the safety of the inhabitants; others are small amulets composed of sand or clay of a certain kind, leaves of a particular tree, scraps of paper containing a few marks or characters, and incased in leather or cloth, so as to be worn on some part of the body.

Although the Africans do not often worship their Greegrees, or regard them as gods invested with creative power, yet they hold them very sacred, and believe them to be a reliable means by which innumerable benefits are secured, and many evils daily avoided. The African sometimes whispers or mumbles to the Greegree his wants, and also thanks it when he has escaped any threatened calamity; but on being asked how a thing that has neither intelligence nor life can deliver people from danger, he generally replies that it cannot do so itself, but that in some way through it the benefit is obtained.

At several places in the Mindi country I saw earthen pots filled with bones, and horns, and herbs, and numerous other things, and placed at the entrances of gardens, and near fruit trees, to prevent the approach of thieves. A head-man of a village on Sherbro Island kept, on a covered platform at the side of his

house, two large sea-shells to promote the health and growth of his twin children. A heathen priest near the mission, fastened a mat to the ground near a large ant-hill, in order to effect the decline and death of his enemy simultaneously with the destruction of the mat by the voracious insects. A native chief on Sherbro Island kept a stone image at the side of his door to secure the general prosperity of his household. When I asked him who made the image, he replied that he supposed God made it, or if he did not, he could tell nothing about its origin, as he had never heard of its being made by any one. It was perhaps many generations old. At the Gambia river, I saw a native from the interior part of the country, on whose person I could count as many as thirty Greegrees, each of which was designed to ward off some particular evil, or secure some special good; and yet with all these supposed means of safety, he would not so much as allow me to put my finger on any part of his body; but fled whenever I approached to examine his rare collection of amulets.

It is thus seen, that although the Africans have very few idols, and very seldom engage in idol worship, still they superstitiously rely

on an endless variety of talismans or charms, for the common advantages and comforts of life. And this use of Greegrees is certainly somewhat like the use of the Seraphim or talismans among the ancient heathen nations, so often mentioned in the Bible.

In Gen. xxxi. 19, we read that Rachel, who was the daughter of Laban, "stole the images that were her father's," and carried them away with her when she left her father's house to accompany her husband Jacob to the Land of Canaan. In the thirtieth verse of the same chapter, Laban calls these images his "gods;" and from the thirty-third verse it is evident that he valued them very highly, and was exceedingly anxious to regain them. It is clear enough that Laban, who at best seems to have been an unfair man, and much addicted to low cunning, was in the habit of using these images for superstitious purposes. And by long indulgence in this practice he had doubtless become very superstitious, and was therefore greatly alarmed at the loss of his supposed means of safety and prosperity. I have often observed that scarcely any thing will cause the African heathen so much uneasiness as the loss of their Greegrees.

Rachel, however, kept these gods, and Laban was obliged to return home without them. This was all well enough if she did it to show her father the folly of trusting in idols. But as she had been under her father's training during her whole childhood and youth, it is more likely that she had imbibed his pagan notions, and still retaining some degree of confidence in the power of his gods, she carried them with her, either to prevent her father from employing them against her and her family, or else to use them for her own protection in the strange land to which she was going. At the same time, it appears that she was ashamed to let Jacob know that she entertained such feelings, and that she had the images in her possession; for it is stated (Gen. xxxi. 32,) that "Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them." I have known some African converts to Christianity to act just in the same manner—that is, secretly to adhere to some of their superstitious opinions for a long time, although they were carefully instructed in the truths of the Bible. Sinful habits and opinions that are formed in youth are hard to correct in after-life.

But whether Rachel retained these images for superstitious purposes or not, we learn

from the thirty-fifth chapter of Genesis that Jacob, some years afterwards, found false gods of some kind in his family; for, in the second verse of that chapter, it is stated, that "Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, put away the strange gods that are among you;" and accordingly, in the fourth verse, it is added, that "They gave unto Jacob all the strange gods that were in their hands, and all their ear-rings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem." Perhaps Laban's gods were among these, and perhaps Rachel's having them had encouraged other members of the family to procure some of the talismans or charms (such as the ear-rings mentioned) from the heathen people around them. It is not safe to indulge even a little in a known sinful practice, for it is very likely to lead to gross and ruinous transgression.

OBSERVING SIGNS — PRACTISING DIVINATION.

The heathen negroes almost universally believe in the revelation of future events by certain appearances and occurrences, with

which the events can have no possible connection. All classes of people, therefore, profess to know many signs of things yet future, and much time is spent in their observance and interpretation. The departure of a flock of "rice-birds" from their accustomed home in the top of a cotton-wood tree, near a town, is regarded as a sign that the place will soon be destroyed by some wanton plunderers, or some vindictive enemy. But the settlement of a troop of these little songsters is equally as certain a token of the town's safety, although the country may be invaded by hostile troops. Real and imagined appearances in the sky are thought to foreshadow some dreadful calamity, or some remarkable felicity. The dreams of the night portend the good or bad fortune of the coming day.

But, in addition to all this attention to the precursors of coming events, the Africans sometimes seek oracular instructions in determining matters of great importance, such as undertaking a campaign against an enemy. The most prominent, perhaps, of these auguries is that of consulting what, on the Boom river, is called the "*Tassaw.*" This is a sort of oracle kept by a secret association called the *Purrah*, the members of which are accus-

tomed to hold meetings in dense jungles set apart for that purpose, and there to engage in singing and dancing, to invoke the spirit that is supposed to speak through the Tassaw to the officials of the order. After these exercises, which none but the members are allowed to witness, the whole society comes forth and holds a public meeting in the "barre," or town-hall, where questions of public interest are sometimes discussed, and decisions announced. But the decisions are more generally given during night meetings held in the deep jungles, and are announced in a loud and hollow voice, so as to terrify the people who are listening without. These utterances are said to proceed directly from the Tassaw, or else are the precise interpretations of what it has in some other manner revealed.

At the town of Kissahull, I once saw the Purrah assembled in the "*barre*," with the Tassaw in their midst, deliberating upon some measures to promote the peace of the country. The Tassaw was a large bowl-shaped vessel, decorated with feathers of large birds, and supported by eight human thigh-bones. The bones were not placed perpendicularly under the vessel, but were so inclined that every pair crossed, taking the form of the

letter X; and at two of the points of intersection, human skulls were made fast, facing outward, and having pieces of mica inserted in the eye-sockets, in imitation of eyes. The whole structure was painted in a variety of colors, and in a most fantastic manner. We were told that the bones and skulls were taken from persons slain for the purpose, and that those of an individual who had died an ordinary death, or had been slain in battle, could not be used in constructing the Tassaw.

These oracles, however, are made in a great variety of forms, some of them not at all like the one just described; and many of them are not exposed to the view of the people at any time, being carefully concealed in the "Purrah Bush."

No doubt some of the leaders in this order know that the oracle itself can give no decisions or responses of any kind, and are induced to carry on the deception by the advantages which in various ways it affords them. But perhaps the majority of even the leading Purrah men are so blinded by superstition, that they resort to these auguries with sincerity and confidence. They have no well-defined theories in regard to the matter, but in the absence of better teachings they blindly

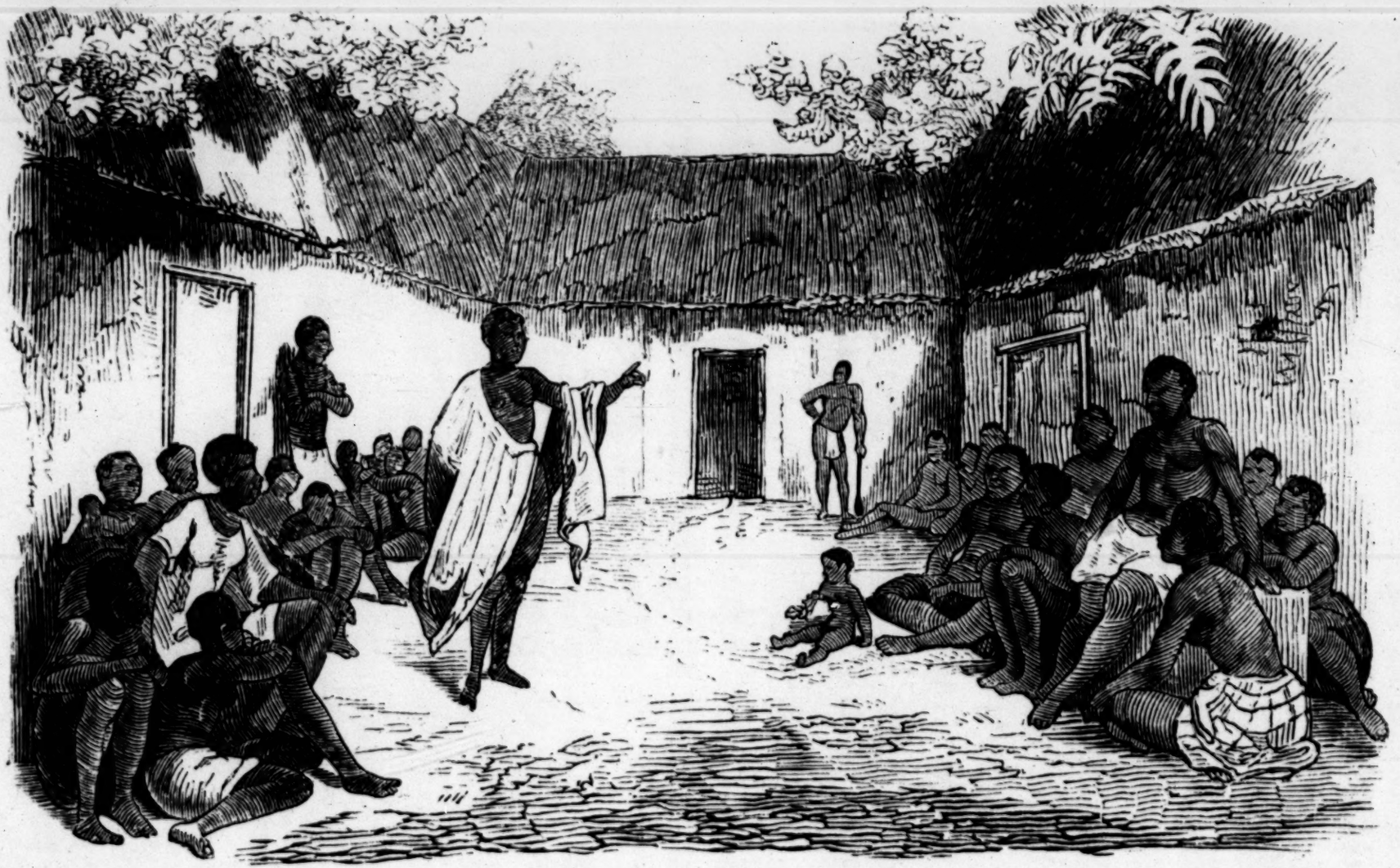
and vaguely rely on their Tassaw for direction in matters of perplexity and doubt.

By the same blind feeling, perhaps, the ancient Canaanites were led to practice the superstitious rites for which they were so noted in their day. At least they observed signs and consulted auguries of some kind; for Moses, speaking to the Israelites in regard to them, says (Deut. xviii. 14,) "These nations which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners." And it appears that they were accustomed to assemble in groves, as the Africans do now; for Moses, in giving instruction to his people in regard to breaking up these superstitious practices, says (Ex. xxxiv. 13,) "Ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves."

The ancient Babylonians also practiced arts of divination, as will appear from the representation that Ezekiel gives of their king having resorted to such means to determine which of the two cities, Jerusalem or Rabbath, he should first besiege when he had invaded the Holy Land, and had advanced to a place where the road parted—one branch leading to Jerusalem, and the other to Rab-

bath. This description is given in Ezek. xxi. 21, and reads thus: "The king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of two ways, to use divination: he made his arrows bright, he consulted with images, he looked in the liver." Here are mentioned three methods of augury—first, to draw from the quiver two arrows, as lots, with the names of the two cities on them, under the idea that the first name drawn is the city first to be besieged — second, to seek some kind of response from images — and third, to examine the livers of a recently slaughtered animal, to learn from their soundness or decay, their color or position, the prospects of the expedition against each city.

The Babylonians were, in their day, a great people; and the fact that their rulers and commanders would allow themselves to be directed in their most important undertakings by such uncertain and absurd counsels as these, shows how liable men are to fall into error when not instructed in the doctrines of the Bible.



RELATING TRADITIONS AND FABLES.

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MINGLING TRUE AND FALSE RELIGIONS.

THERE was a chief in the Sherbro, who had, in part at least, adopted the Mahometan religion, and carefully practiced many of its rites, along with numerous pagan forms and observances. In accordance with Mahometanism he had "five wives and no more" — abstained entirely from the use of spirituous liquors — ate no flesh of swine — refused to partake of the meat of any animal or fowl that had not been slain by a priest, and statedly attended to the specified prayers. But at the same time he adhered to many pagan notions and pagan usages.

In a conversation which I had with this man, I found him entirely willing to add yet to the medley of religious creeds and forms, which he had already adopted, at least a few items of the Christian faith and practice. He remarked that he then had some of his children at the Mission School, and had several times heard preaching at his own town; and that having observed nothing wrong in our religion, and believing it to have some virtues, he was in favor of having it introduced among his people, along with what they already had, so that they might enjoy

the aggregate good of all. I attempted to show him the completeness and superiority of the Christian religion, and therefore the propriety of receiving it entire, and to the exclusion of the others; but he argued that such a course would be manifestly unwise, since by receiving only the one, he would be confined to the excellencies of one, while by accepting them all, he would secure their combined virtues. The fact that these different systems embraced things incompatible with each other, presented to his mind no difficulty whatever, and therefore he was ready to adopt, in some vague manner, certain parts of the Gospel, or perhaps the whole of it, in connection with the Pagan and Mahometan tenets which he already professed.

This attempt to blend opposite religious systems reminds one of a similar instance described in the seventeenth chapter of Judges. It is there related that a man named Micah, of Mount Ephraim, had a sort of family chapel, which, as it seems, was designed for the worship of the true God, but into which Micah had introduced some of both Jewish and Pagan rites and ordinances. In the fifth verse of the chapter, we read that "Micah

had a house of gods, and made an ephod, and a teraphim, and consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest." The ephod was part of a Jewish priest's dress, and this one was probably made similar to those used in the tabernacle; but the teraphim were no doubt the two silver images mentioned in the fourth verse of the same chapter, and were such as were used by the heathen generally at that time. The first priest, Micah's son, was most likely as ignorant and as destitute of piety as himself, and the one afterwards procured was a low-minded Levite, who was wandering about the country, and was willing to engage in acts of idolatry for the small sum of money which Micah paid him.

It seems strange that Micah, who belonged to one of the tribes of Israel, would engage in this senseless and idolatrous scheme; but this instance shows how easily men are led astray in matters of religion. Micah perhaps thought that the ample provisions which he had here made would secure him the highest favors; and in the thirteenth verse he expresses this confidence in these words: "Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest." How many,

like Micah, substitute something of their own for what God has commanded, and then indulge a vain confidence in their religious performances!

HANDING DOWN TRADITIONS.

THE pagans of Africa do not understand the art of writing, and therefore have no written laws, or histories, or records of any kind. But they have handed down by tradition a vast amount of historic information and other useful instruction, in the forms of anecdotes, fables, and proverbs. These are often repeated by the older people to the children and youth, who take great delight in hearing them, and carefully treasure them up in their own minds for future use.

Not only are the traditions of the past thus handed down to the rising race, but also the remarkable events of their own times, after having been investigated by the principal men of the town, and put into proper form, are communicated to the people, and repeated at their gatherings, till fully impressed upon the public mind. Some persons who have more retentive memories than is common, and take particular pleasure in these recitals,

become noted for their stores of knowledge; and these, as well as the old men generally, are often seen surrounded by eager groups of listeners, to whom they are narrating the things which they have in like manner learned from others.

Such discourses are frequently delivered about the gates of the village—in the public barre — and in the pleasant shade of the orange and plantain trees that so commonly ornament the towns; but they are more generally recited in the open court belonging to many of the African houses. Many, particularly of the chiefs and head men, construct their dwellings in such a way as to inclose an uncovered square in the centre. This square has an inner entrance from all the apartments of the house; but the entrance from without is through the front building, so that the court is a place of seclusion and safety.

In this inclosed space, retired from the tumult of the town, the family, made up of several wives and their children, together with other friends and acquaintances, frequently sit till a late hour during the moonlight nights, and eagerly listen to the numerous recitals of the older members of the company. At the conclusion of a story or a

fable, the gratified listeners often return thanks to the speaker, and sometimes the exercises are varied by the singing of a short song or ballad.

How frequently, while witnessing these interesting scenes, have I thought of such Scripture passages as that of Joel i. 3:—"Tell ye your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation." The admonition here given is that the father should make known from generation to generation, God's terrible threatenings against sin, and thereby deter them from it, and thus save the nation from ruin.

In these ancient times, the art of printing was unknown, and there were but few *written* books; and many of the people could not have read, if books had been given them. The manuscript copies of the Scriptures were mostly in the hands of the priests and the scribes, and therefore, like the natives of Africa at the present time, the people had to depend chiefly on oral traditions. It was partly on this account, perhaps, that Moses, after having given the Law of God to the Israelites, so earnestly exhorted them to repeat it often to their children. He says (Deut.

vi. 6 and 7,) "And all these words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

We now enjoy great advantages in having printed copies of the Bible and other good books furnished so plentifully, and at so little cost; but still it is very necessary that children receive much verbal instruction from their parents, and from other pious persons of age and experience.

THE END.